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# **LIFE AND CHARACTER OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN**

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**REMARKS**

**OF**

**HON. KNUTE NELSON**

**OF MINNESOTA**

**IN THE**

**SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES**

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1918**



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OF MINNESOTA.

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LIFE AND CHARACTER OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, inasmuch as this is the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, I will ask the indulgence of the Senate to make a few remarks in reference to his life and character.

The institution of slavery had made a cleavage among the white people of the South and given them a peasant class such as was not found among the people of the North. This peasantry, though poor, uncultured, and unlettered, was nevertheless in the essential make-up far superior in vigor and spirit to its counterpart in the Old World. It was patient, courageous, intensely democratic, and in many instances charged with a suppressed intellectual vigor that on great occasions, even under adverse circumstances, would assert itself and be in the ascendant. From the very loins of this class and as a crystallization of all the virile force and vigor that was in it came Abraham Lincoln—born the American peasant, died the American king. His parentage, home, and surroundings were of the humblest kind—scarce was there ever a humbler. His moral and intellectual environment was of the most primitive order—as primitive as the undeveloped region in which his early lot was cast. But the embryo of a great soul and a brave heart was in him; and so under inspiration from on high he grew untrammelled in the midst of the barrenness whence he sprang, as the straight and lofty pine grows in the stony cleft of the hoary and craggy mountain—slowly, surely, irresistibly, and heavenward.

His development from childhood to manhood, from a backwoodsman to a statesman, was a saga, simple in its unity, sad

and somber in its texture, but inspiring and heroic in its outcome and results. From Nolin Creek to the banks of the Sangamon the path was winding and rough. A mother's love was given and found in a stepmother—the guiding star on a long and dreary journey. And that love, with which a man loves but once in his life, was buried in the grave of Anne Rutledge. From that moment love claimed and was given less and duty more, and from that moment he seemed dedicated and in training for the great task and mission that was to be his. Feeble minds assuage grief such as was his in the frivolous vanities of the world; but strong minds and heroic souls, though tried and chastened, seek relief and find rest in the surging, real, and relentless battle of life where the turmoil is the fiercest and the strife rages the hottest.

Lincoln was the true exponent and the living embodiment of this class, and at that time there was no moral or intellectual battle ground so interesting, grand, and inviting as the field of political controversy and evolution in the far West. Gifted and highly equipped by nature, trained and tempered in the scant school and the rude ways of the frontiersman, and chastened by the shadows and sorrows that had come upon him, he entered the arena a trained gladiator, qualified to do battle with giants, and there was no lack of real and aggressive giants to contend with in those days. But for want of a vital issue the struggle was for a time a mere skirmish at the outposts, a mere reconnoissance, the remote prelude to the great tragedy of the century. From the gloomy shadows and dark clouds, whence sprang our hero, came also in battle array the great anti-Christian slavery, defiant and eager for battle and conquest. Slavery, in her zeal and quest for vantage, protruded her advance guard into Kansas, and on its virgin soil was fought a veritable “Inkerman”—a battle of fierce, stubborn, and isolated skirmishes. And soon along the entire line from Kansas to the Ohio, and thence to the Potomac, there was a marshaling of forces, a skirmish fire, and a reconnoissance in force, that betokened a momentous and prolonged struggle. In these preliminary conflicts there were many able leaders; and Lincoln, though one of

them, was not at first regarded as the foremost. But on the eve of the great battle none disputed his chieftainship of the mighty hosts of the North. He was the heart and soul of all our people, imbued with faith in them, in himself, in the cause, and in God.

Sad and serious were those days to all of us, but most of all to him, and it made him more serious and sad than ever. But from that great task and duty, entailed upon him by man and God, he shrank not; no, not one iota nor tittle; no, not even in those darkest of all days, when bolder and more aggressive men than he doubted and quailed. He was more hopeful and more confident than the most of us, because his faith was loftier and more boundless. And he ennobled the struggle and hallowed the cause of the Union by severing the last shackles of the bondsmen. He looms up to us over the vista of the passing years as the great spirit of that mighty whirlwind. God gave him to us to work out a great problem in the moral world. His task was Godlike. His life, his mission, and his death were those of a martyr. And he sanctified the Union to us and to our posterity for all time to come.

When can his glory fade?  
Oh, the brave charge he made—  
All the world wondered.

Mr. LEWIS. Mr. President, unless there are some other Senators who desire to address the Chair on this day, I move, in commemoration of the day and as a mark of tribute to the memory of Abraham Lincoln, that the Senate do now adjourn.

The motion was unanimously agreed to; and (at 1 o'clock and 15 minutes p. m.) the Senate adjourned until to-morrow, Wednesday, February 13, 1918, at 12 o'clock meridian.

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